



Reading Nonfiction Aloud: Encouraging Student Responses

I talk to lots of educators who are interested in sharing more nonfiction read alouds with their students, but they have some concerns. One question I hear again and again is:

“How do I encourage and facilitate student responses to a nonfiction read aloud?”

Trust me. This is the last thing they need to worry about. Here’s why:

During a fiction read aloud, students have no idea what to expect. The story could go in any direction at all. The only limit is the author’s imagination. As a result, during fiction read alouds, students often sit quietly, waiting to hear how the story will unfold.

But students come to nonfiction read alouds armed with a powerful tool—their prior knowledge. They’ll have a cornucopia ideas and opinions before you even open the book. In fact, one of your students may even be a mini-expert on the topic.



Instead of passively waiting to hear the story, children are eager to contribute. All you have to do is let them. Encourage children to talk with one another about what they’re hearing and thinking and wondering. Every once in a while, stop reading and invite students to share their thoughts.

While organic student-led conversations are often sufficient, in some cases, you may want to document a nonfiction read-aloud experience. In his wonderful article “Nurturing Inquiring Minds with Nonfiction Read Alouds,” highly-regarded educator Tony Stead suggests

recording student thinking before, during, and after the read aloud using a table with the following headings: “What We Think We Know,” “Confirmed,” “We Don’t Think this Anymore,” “Exciting New Information,” and “Wonderings.”

This strategy works especially well when students come to the read aloud with misconceptions about a topic. It can also spark inquiry and guide students as they independently research and write about a topic.